

## EXISTING USES AND RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

### A. Land Use

The glaciated topography and limiting factors of the soils of the Pigeon River watershed limit agricultural activities. In areas where soils are more productive and slopes more gentle, dairy farming continues as a minor land use in the area. However, the major trend in the northern areas of the state is the abandonment of nonproductive farms. Hunting, fishing and other resort activities account for a large part of the land utilization in the area. Seasonal and permanent dwellings are fairly common and are concentrated along or near lakes or streams. A growing demand for recreational lands is one of the reasons for a higher proportion of private land retention in the watershed.

Development would be considered light along the entire river's length. From the headwaters to Tin Bridge, approximately 26 miles, only a few individual cottages exist in the upper reaches, two groups of cottages are located near the old Vanderbilt Road Bridge, and a cluster of buildings at the old Lansing Dam Club are visible from the river.

There are several subdivisions located adjacent to the Pigeon River. Most are located towards the mouth. All are in Cheboygan County. One subdivision is located on the Little Pigeon River. Generally, the lots in the subdivision adjacent to the Pigeon are larger, seasonal, recreation oriented, providing lower building densities and a higher quality type of development.

There are no commercial or industrial developments located on the river.

### B. Hydrocarbon Development

For the past several years, the Pigeon River Country has been embodied in a controversy centering around oil and gas development in and around the state forest. In late 1980, an agreement was reached through the courts that opened the door to limited hydrocarbon development in the Pigeon River Country State Forest area. The development of hydrocarbon resources in the Pigeon River Country State Forest will be south and east of the Pigeon River itself. The court stipulation agreed to a "nondevelopment status" for the northern portion of the forest for 25 years beginning on June 11, 1976. Further, it was agreed that no well sites or associated roads could be permitted within ¼ mile of the river. In addition, no pipeline, flowline or electric transmission line crossings of the Pigeon shall be permitted. There are also strict safeguards on sound and odor levels. Storage of gas will not be permitted in the northern portion of the forest.

### C. Private Recreation Facilities

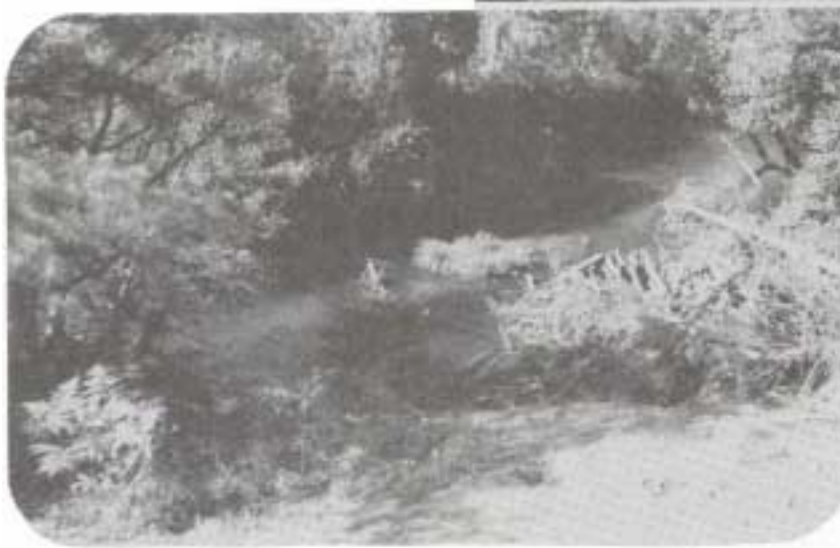
Eighteen private campgrounds provide 1,907 campsites for the camping enthusiast in the two county area encompassing the watershed. Many of these campgrounds provide related recreational opportunities such as fishing, boating, swimming, hiking, etc. Other outdoor recreation activities provided by private sources include canoe and boat rentals, five ski areas for winter sports, and two public golf courses and a riding stable.

#### D. Public Recreational Facilities

Camping facilities along the immediate river area are limited. Pine Grove, Pigeon River and Pigeon Bridge Forest campgrounds offer just 37 campsites. Additional camping is available at Elk Hill Trail Camp. However, within a short drive of the river, nine forest campgrounds, four state parks and one county park offer 1,350 campsites.

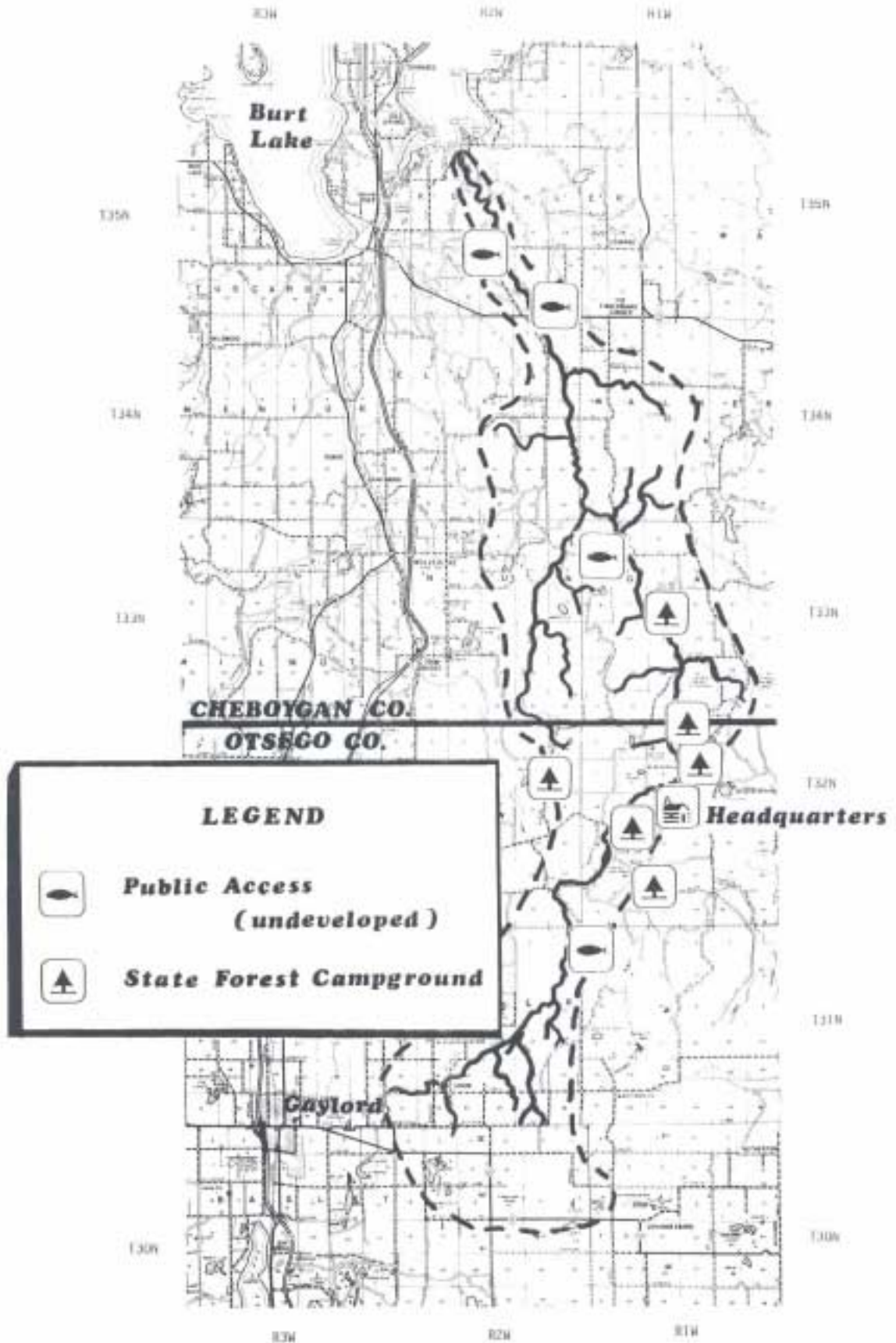
There are eight public access sites (including the four forest campgrounds) located along the river. Additional access to the Pigeon for fishermen is provided over state lands and at county road bridges. Thirty-two other public access sites provide access to the many lakes and streams in the two county area through which the Pigeon River flows.

Footbridge  
Pine Grove Campground



Pigeon River Overlook  
Cheboygan County

Other public facilities or areas of interest in the vicinity are: (1) the many miles of hiking, snowmobile and cross-country ski trails provided in the state forests, (2) Fort Michilimackinac, (3) ferry service to Bois Blanc Island and Mackinac Island where historic Fort Mackinac is located, (4) Ocqueoc Falls, and (5) five Wildlife Division waterfowl floodings.





## E. Fishing

The Pigeon River and its spring fed tributaries are classified as top quality trout waters and except for a few deeper pools are generally wadeable for fishing. With the exception of a short period just after opening day, fishing pressure is generally light. However, many anglers return annually to fish this outstanding stream.

Brook trout are the dominant and most sought after species. Due to cool water temperatures, the majority of the brook trout caught are in the 7" to 9" size class. However, a few larger brookies, up to 16", are taken. In addition to brook trout, brown trout are also present throughout the river system. Although the majority of the browns taken are 7" to 10", 14" to 16" fish are fairly common with a few up to 20" being caught. A small anadromous run of rainbow trout from Mullett Lake exists in the lower river.

## F. Wildlife Observation and Hunting

The Pigeon River valley and surrounding Pigeon River country contain a good variety and population of large game, small game, furbearing animals and waterfowl, as well as a great many species of nongame animals.

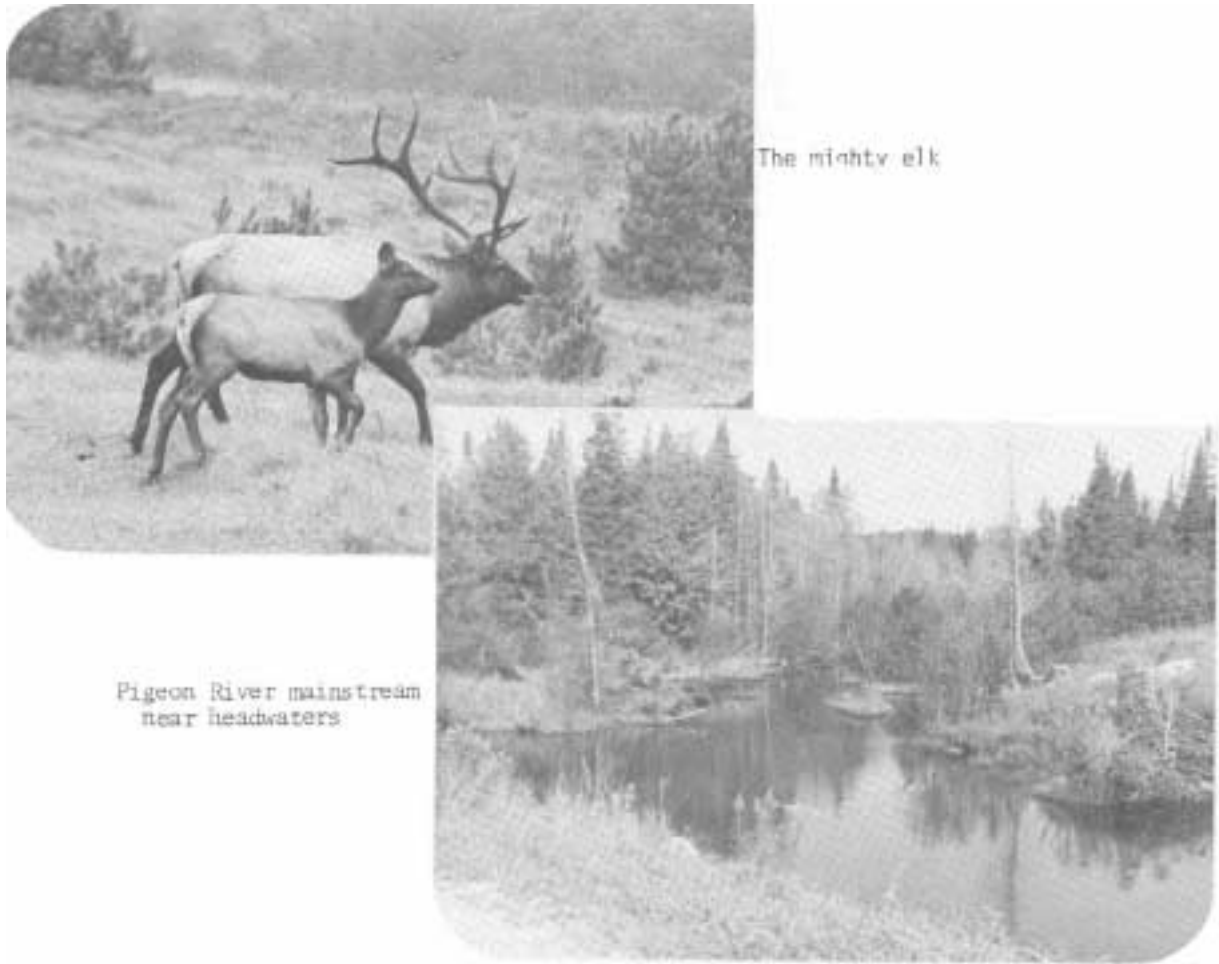
Major game species in the area include whitetail deer, squirrels (black, gray and fox), cottontail rabbits, snowshoe hare, ruffed grouse, woodcock and many species of waterfowl. Other species that provide opportunities for observation or sport are raccoon, coyote, red fox, porcupine, badger, skunk, red squirrel and woodchuck. Beaver, muskrat, mink and otter are important furbearers associated with the watercourses and adjoining wetlands.

The Pigeon River Country also provides habitat for several scarce species most typically found in large tracts of secluded lands, including bobcat, black bear, wild turkey and the unique elk. As of July 1981, a population of approximately 600 elk is found in the Pigeon River country. These magnificent animals provide the outdoorsman with a thrilling experience when they are sighted. Wild turkeys, once a native Michigan species, have moved from introductions made in the Mio area and are now reestablishing in areas to the east of the watershed.

The threatened osprey nests on the Cornwall Creek Flooding and the bald eagle nests outside the Pigeon River Country State Forest, but frequents the state lands and drainages of the Pigeon.

There are several other species of animals that are classified as threatened, rare or scarce whose range includes the watershed. They include the following: Mammals: Pine Vole. Birds: Black-Crowned Night Heron, Red-Shouldered Hawk, Cooper's Hawk. Reptiles and Amphibians: Wood Turtle.

A diverse group of other animals reside there as well, including bird life, mammals, reptiles and amphibians. A great variety of birds seasonally migrate through the area (see attached faunal lists – Appendix E).



#### G. Canoeing and Boating

Although the Pigeon River is free flowing, except for the old Lansing Club Dam, it is not a good river for canoeing. The 27 miles of river from Red Bridge up to the headwaters is relatively small, shallow and had numerous logjams and downed trees to portage. The 17 miles of river below Red Bridge is more suitable for canoeing. It has a good stream gradient and sufficient depths to afford a pleasant day's trip down the river. The lower six miles of river, before it levels off to the level of Mullett Lake, has a high gradient with numerous gravel and rubble riffles. During low water periods, this stretch offers a challenge to select the proper channel or end up on a gravel bar. The river is not suitable for boating, except for small boats in the first mile of river above Mullett Lake.

#### H. Historic and Archaeological Sites

There are no historic or archaeological sites listed on either the State Register or the National Register of Historic Places along the Pigeon River in Otsego and Cheboygan counties. Since there was a great deal of Indian and European activity in this area of Michigan in the past, such sites undoubtedly exist. However, until surveyed by archaeologists, there is no way to evaluate the historical or archaeological significance of the river.

